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ABSTRACT

This report presents cross-sectional data on the relationships of alcohol difficulties, antisocial behavior, family conflict, family violence, and, particularly, spousal violence. The data were derived from a large-scale, longitudinal study of causes of alcohol abuse and the development of patterns of family violence. Subjects in the part of the study discussed in this paper were 75 working class couples with a male preschool-age child at risk for alcohol problems in adulthood due to the father's alcoholism. The violence of husband to wife and the violence of wife to husband, during the year before the assessment, were analyzed. Severity and cumulative intensity of violence scores were recorded. A severity score was the highest level of physical violence perpetrated during the past year. Cumulative intensity was a summation score based on the level of violence intensity times the frequency of the violence, summed for all levels of violence items. As expected, positive, zero order correlations were found between antisocial behavior, long-term alcohol involvement, family conflict, and husbands' reports of violent behavior toward their wives. A history of alcohol-related troubles was associated with a negative family environment and increased violence in the home. Findings suggest that different dynamics contribute to severity of violence and cumulative intensity of violence. (RH)

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Alcohol Involvement and Family Violence in a High Risk Sample: I. Spousal Violence

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[1] Paper presented at the 96th Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Atlanta, August 12-16, 1988.

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Alcohol Involvement and Family Violence in a High Risk Sample: I. Spousal Violence[1,2]

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The alcoholism and family violence literatures both suggest that a relationship exists between alcohol use and abuse, and violence in the home (Morgan, 1982). Although clinical reports bind the two rather substantially, little systematic evidence exists to support an empirical link between violence and alcoholism in families. Evidence from child and spouse abuse populations has shown that a large subset of assaulters are alcohol abusers (Byles, 1978; Gelles, 1974). However, much of these data are suggestive rather than definitive, given that the studies have largely been done on clinically based, typically self-referred (and therefore unrepresentative) samples, or are derived from general population surveys which undersample the high risk, alcohol abusing population (Leonard & Jacob, 1987). In addition, little attention has been given to systematically defining and differentiating alcohol use and abuse, and specifying whether it refers to past as contrasted with current alcohol consumption and difficulties. Finally, although the high incidence of alcohol abuse in family violence statistics cannot be utilized to confirm the occurrence of violence in alcoholic families, many similarities have been noted between violent and alcoholic families (Spieker, 1983), with both identified as multi-problem and dysfunctional. It is important to determine whether the violence that

occurs in alcoholic families is attributed directly to alcohol involvement or to other characteristics of this troubled population.

This report is part of a larger scale, population based, longitudinal study that is concerned with tracing out both the etiology of alcohol abuse and alcoholism and the development (and insulation against development) of patterns of violence within families (Zucker et al., 1984; Zucker, 1987). The study is following a sample of already alcoholic, but not yet treated families with young children, and is examining the relationships over time of alcohol difficulties, antisocial behavior, family conflict, and family violence. The present report presents cross-sectional data from the T1 data set on these issues, with specific focus on spousal violence. It was expected that positive associations would be found, but it was unclear the extent to which family conflict would serve as a predictor above and beyond the influence of alcohol involvement and/or antisocial behavior. In addition, recent literature suggests that current heavy alcohol use does not always lead to greater incidence of family related difficulty (Dunn, Jacob, Hummon, & Seilhamer, 1987), so the role of current versus lifetime alcohol involvement was also explored. Since this is the T1 data set of a longitudinal study, the relationships discussed are associational, rather than causal.

SUBJECTS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects are 75 couples from the Michigan State University Longitudinal Study. The study involves a set of families who are in an early phase of the family life cycle, with preschool-aged children at

heightened risk for alcohol problems in adulthood. The mean age of both parents is 30 years, and the families are primarily working class in occupational status. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Insert Table 1 about here

The family's high risk characteristics are established by way of the father's alcoholism, and the fact that the target child is male. In order to qualify for study inclusion, at the time of inital contact the family must be intact and sons must be between the age of 3.0 and 6.0 years. Alcoholic fathers are obtained from the drunk driver population, and are screened to have a sufficiently high blood alcohol level (0.15%) (i.e., 150 mg/100 ml) such that there is presumptive evidence of tolerance. Later data are used to verify the presumptive diagnosis established during the initial screening procedure. Mothers' alcoholism is neither grounds for accepting or rejecting the family.

Fathers are systematically recruited via a net of administrative arrangements covering all district courts and all drunk driving arrests in a three county area. Families with appropriate characteristics are identified by court personnel, and are asked whether they will allow their names to be released to the study staff, to be involved in "a study on family health and child development." If the family agrees to participate, they become involved in an eight session assessment schedule that includes both parents and the target child. The majority

of the data collection takes place in respondents' homes, and the families are paid a fee for completing the assessment process.

Data for the work reported here were obtained from six instruments that were completed during the in-home assessment. All materials were completed by both parents, working separately.

(a) A Demographic Questionnaire was administered during the first session, which inquired about background information on self and family of origin. This instrument provided data from which the demographic items and information about marital history were coded.

(b) The Family Environment Scale (FES) (Moos & Moos, 1981) was also administered, both for the scales designed to assess family conflict (Conflict and Cohesion), as well as for its utility as a frequently used, more general measure of the family environment and its functioning. It assesses perceptions of three aspects of family climate: areas of personal involvement and activity, quality of interpersonal relationships, and degree of structure.

(c) Prior antisocial history was assessed via the Antisocial Behavior Checklist, a forty-six item, self-administered inventory which includes items from ten content domains that assess a variety of child, adolescent, and adult antisocial behaviors (Zucker & Noll, 1980a). Total antisocial behavior (TASB) is the score that will be used in this paper. The instrument has previously been used successfully in the assessment of adolescent antisocial behavior (Zucker & Barron, 1973; Zucker & DeVoe, 1975), and has been shown to have appropriate internal homogeneity and test-retest reliability .

(d) The primary measure of both family conflict and violence was the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980), an instrument previously used in national survey work, assessing the incidence of spousal violence (both self to spouse and spouse to self), parent violence to child, as well as child violence to parent. Several of the items were regrouped to shorten the interview, but the basic structure of the instrument follows closely on the original version. To encourage accuracy of reporting, this instrument was interviewer administered approximately three-quarters of the way through the administration of the NIMH Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS) (Robins, Helzer, Croughan, & Ratcliff, 1981; Robins et al., 1985). Since the DIS with this population typcially takes about two hours to administer, maximal rapport with the interviewer existed at the time the CTS was given.

Analyses in this paper refer specifically to spousal violence during the past year, in particular to reports of one's own violence to spouse, for both husbands and wives (i.e., husband violence to wife and wife violence to husband). Severity and Cumulative Intensity are the two violence scores used: the Severity measure is a Guttman scale of the CTS items (the most severe forms of physical violence have higher scores). A subject's Severity score is the highest level of physical violence reported during the past year. Cumulative intensity is a summation score, based on the product of level of violence intensity times frequency of the violence, summed across all levels of violence items. Thus, one receives a higher score for both more frequent

violence and for higher levels of it, and the measure reflects this combined influence.

(e) An extensive Drinking and Drug History was also administered during one of the questionnaire sessions (Zucker & Noll, 1980b). This instrument contains Cahalan, Cisin, and Crossley's standard survey questions, used to determine the Quantity-Frequency-Variability (QFV) measure of alcohol consumption during the past six months (Cahalan, Cisin, & Crossley, 1969). It also contains questions about drug use (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1979), and about problems connected to very heavy alcohol involvement (Schuckit, 1978). All of these measures have been heavily used in other studies on alcohol and drug use/abuse. From these data, and from the questions on alcohol involvement on the DIS, a composite measure of lifetime alcohol related difficulties, the Lifetime Alcohol Problems Score (LAPS) (Zucker, 1988) was generated. LAPS measures three different areas of alcohol involvement: age of onset- assessed by age of first drunkenness; variety of problems (number of different areas of alcohol related difficulty); and density of alcohol problems weighted for the extent of their presence over the life course. Scores for the three areas are standardized, then summed, to give a composite index of extent of alcohol related problems that spans the drinking career.

RESULTS

(1) Relationship of prior antisocial involvement to prior and current alcohol involvement in young alcoholic men and their wives.

Data pertaining to these relationships are presented in Table 2. As expected, findings replicate earlier, very strong positive relationships between prior conduct problems (Total ASB) and lifetime alcohol involvement (LAPS), for both husbands ($r=.64$, $p<.001$) and wives ($r=.45$, $p<.001$). However, no relationship was present between prior conduct problems and current drinking (QFV) for husbands ($r=.03$) and a low order positive one ($r=.22$, $p<.10$, 2t), was found for wives.

Relationships of spousal patterns of similarity were also expected to be positive between husbands and wives for prior antisocial behavior, lifetime alcohol difficulties, and current drinking, since it was anticipated that these characteristics would be common bases of association between spouses. However, no significant relationship was found between husbands' and wives' antisocial activity ($r=.05$), or for lifetime alcohol involvement ($r=.04$). That is, level of antisocial involvement and of long term alcohol involvement appear not to be a basis of association in these marriages. However, there is a significant positive relationship between husbands' and wives' current drinking ($r=.41$, $p<.001$). Greater current drinking in husbands is related to greater current drinking in wives. It is thought that

drinking may be one way that couples relate as a way of life.

Insert Table 2 about here

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(2) Relationship of parent characteristics to recent spousal violence in young alcoholic families.

Husband as aggressor/wife as target. As shown in Table 3, significant relationships between husband's (aggressor) characteristics and his reports of violence to his wife include his own long-term alcohol related difficulty (LAPS) ($r=.46$, $p\leq.001$ for severity; $r=.50$, $p\leq.01$ for cumulative intensity), his prior conduct problems (TASB) ($r=.60$, $p\leq.001$ for severity; $r=.41$, $p\leq.01$ for cumulative intensity), and age ($r=-.35$, $p\leq.001$ for severity; $r=-.24$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity) (Table 3). Husbands who report having used higher levels of violence toward their wives during the past year also have higher lifetime levels of drinking problems, more antisocial activity, and they are younger in age.

Insert Table 3 about here

Significant relationships between wife's (target of violence) characteristics and husband's reports of greater levels of violence to his wife include her lower current drinking (QFV) ($r=-.23$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity) and younger age ($r=-.29$, $p\leq.05$ for severity;

r=-.24, $p \leq .05$ for cumulative intensity). In those families where husbands report using higher levels of violence toward their wives, the wives currently drink less and are younger in age.

Significant relationships between family background characteristics and husbands' violence to their wives (also Table 3) include years coupled (r=-.23, $p \leq .05$ for severity) and socioeconomic status (r=-.23, $p \leq .05$ for cumulative intensity). Couples who have been together fewer years and are of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to have higher levels of violence in the families. A composite picture emerges of greater husband to wife violence occuring in younger lower SES couples, who have been together for a shorter period of time, where husbands have had more antisocial behavior in their backgrounds, have had a longer and more severe history of drinking problems, and are living with or married to women who currently drink less alcohol.

Wife as aggressor/husband as target. These data are also presented in Table 3. There are no significant relationships between aggressor, target or family background characteristics and wives' reports of violence toward their husbands. Only wives' perceptions of the family environment are significantly related; these associations are presented later (Table 6).

(3) Correlation between number of couple separations and prior history of antisocial and alcohol involvement

There is also substantial evidence that both lifetime drinking problems and prior antisocial behavior have had long term consequences in the marriage (Table 4). More marital separation is associated with

higher levels of prior antisocial activity, and greater lifetime drinking problems in both the men ($r=.36$, $p\leq.01$ for ASB; $r=.34$, $p\leq.01$ for LAPS) and the women ($r=.29$, $p\leq.05$ for ASB; $r=.39$, $p\leq.001$ for LAPS).

Insert Table 4 about here

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(4) Relationships between perceptions of family environment and alcohol involvement

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of alcohol use/abuse in these families, contextual variables also need to be considered (Table 5). In this study, the Moos Family Environment Scale was used to examine the relationship of perceived family environment to one's own prior and current alcohol involvement. It was hypothesized that higher levels of conflict and lower levels of cohesion would be found in families with greater long term drinking difficulties. Level of family conflict assessed by the Conflict Scale (as perceived by husbands, i.e., by the perpetrators) was positively related to husbands' LAPS ($r=.24$, $p\leq.05$), with greater conflict being associated with a greater history of husbands' alcohol related problems. No relationships are found between husbands' perceptions of family environment and their current drinking levels.

Insert Table 5 about here

For wives, level of family Organization and Active Recreational Orientation assessed by the FES (as perceived by wives) was negatively related to their LAPS ($r=-.24$, $p\leq.05$); lower Active Recreational Orientation and lower family Organization are both associated with a greater history of alcohol related problems over the course of the drinking career. However, level of Active Recreational Orientation is positively related to wives' QFV ($r=.31$, $p\leq.01$), with a greater Active Recreational Orientation associated with greater current alcohol consumption. Thus, long term drinking is associated with negative perceptions in the home environment, such as higher conflict, lower cohesion and organization, as well as with a lower active recreational orientation. However, there appears to be some positive associations for women, between current drinking and being involved in a higher active recreational orientation to family life.

(5) Relationships between perceptions of family environment and recent spousal violence.

It is also important to examine the extent to which family environment characteristics (i.e., system variables) are related to spousal violence. These data are reported in Table 6. Husbands' reports of violence to their wives are significantly related to husbands' perceptions on the FES of Cohesion ($r=-.25$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity), Conflict ($r=.24$, $p\leq.05$ for severity; $r=.23$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity), Active Recreational Orientation ($r=-.27$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity) and Organization ($r=-.23$, $p\leq.05$ for severity). Husbands who report having used higher levels of violence toward their wives during the past year also report lower levels of

family cohesion and organization, greater conflict, as well as a lower active recreational orientation in the family.

Insert Table 6 about here

Wives' reports of violence to their husbands are significantly related to wives' perceptions on the FES of lower Cohesion ($r=-.36$, $p\leq.01$ for severity; $r=-.29$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity), greater Conflict ($r=.35$, $p\leq.01$ for severity; $r=.28$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity), and lower Moral-Religious Emphasis ($r=-.27$, $p\leq.05$ for cumulative intensity). In parallel to the husband data, wives who report having used higher levels of violence toward their husbands duing the past year also report lower levels of family cohesion and greater conflict, but they report a lower level of moral-religious emphasis as well. Overall, violence to both wives and husbands is associated with more negative perception of the family environment by the aggressor.

(6) Development of a Model for Spousal Violence.

In developing a comprehensive model of husbands' violence to wives in alcoholic families, it was hypothesized that husbands' prior antisocial behavior and long term drinking difficulty, as well as husbands' and wives' younger ages, would drive family conflict, which would, in turn, lead to increased spousal violence. Figure 1A shows the test of this model, and indicates that, despite the significant contribution of wife's age to family conflict and the near significant

contribution of husband's drinking (LAPS) and age, only husbands' prior antisocial behavior, his long term drinking problems, and his age account for level of severity of violence to the wife. Figure 1B shows the model tested for cumulative intensity of husband's violence to wife. Here only husband's level of long term drinking problems, and a near significant contribution of lower age contribute to the final path. It appears that history of antisocial activity is central in accounting for the level of the most severe forms of violence used, while a history of alcohol related problems accounts for the overall level of violence-- the combination of frequency of occurrence and levels of violence-- that occurs in these families.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Models were also tested for wives' violence to husbands, but none of them were significant. At this point, the set of relationships that account for wives' violence to husbands is far less clear than those accounting for husbands' use of violence to their wives.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) As expected, positive, zero order correlations were found between antisocial behavior, long term alcohol involvement, family conflict, and husbands' reports of violence to their wives. However, the path models indicated that the family conflict measure, at least as presently

assessed, was not serving as a predictor above and beyond the influence of alcohol related difficulties and conduct problems.

In their national survey on family violence, Coleman and Straus (1983) found a curvilinear relationship between frequency of drunkenness during the past year and occurrence of severe violence. Individuals who were frequently drunk were more abusive than those who were seldom drunk; however those who were "very often" or "almost always" drunk were among the least violent subjects. These results are similar to the present study in terms of finding a positive relationship between alcohol use in men and violence toward their wives. As with the present study, Coleman and Straus (1983) also found a negative relationship between socioeconomic status and wife abuse, with more violence to wives occurring in blue collar families. Our findings are, by and large, also consistent with those of Leonard, Bromet, Parkinson, Day and Ryan (1985), who studied a homogenous sample of male factory workers. In contrast, the Coleman and Straus (1983) survey found a relationship of frequency of drunkenness of wives and violence to their husbands; our data indicate this was not the case in the present much more heavily alcohol involved set of families.

(2) The examination of both long term and current drinking indices is informative, because it shows that a <u>history</u> of alcohol related troubles is associated with a negative family environment and increased violence in the home, while no such relationships are found to exist for <u>current</u> alcohol consumption. If anything, greater current drinking was associated with wives' perceptions of a more positive family

environment. In addition, wives' lower current drinking was associated with greater husband violence to them.

In this context, the results of the Leonard et al. (1985) study also concur with those of the present study, in that current drinking (average daily volume for the past month) was not associated with a history of either fighting or physical marital conflict. As in the present study, physical marital conflict was related to a pathological pattern of consumption (e.g., drinking as much as a fifth of distilled spirits in one day, being unable to stop drinking, doing things to control drinking, going on binges, having blackouts or drinking with a serious illness).

(3) The findings suggest that the dynamics contributing to absolute level of violence (severity) as compared to amount (cumulative intensity) are different. Antisocial behavior accounts for the most severe forms of violence used, while long term drinking problems account for cumulative intensity. The discrimination between these two elements is important in future work.

(4) The fact that the present data are not culled from a population generated because of complaints about violence, or because of seeking help for drinking problems, lends credence to these findings as representative of the natural history of spousal violence phenomenona in high-risk-for-violence-populations.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Paper presented at the 96th Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Atlanta, August 12-16, 1988.

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Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Study Sample (N = 75 Couples)

	M	SD
Age		
Wives	29.1 years	4.6 years
Husbands	31.0 years	4.8 years
Education		
Wives	12.8 years	1.9 years
Husbands	12.0 years	1.9 years
Number of Children Living at Home	2.1	0.9

Religion	Wives	Husbands
Protestant	55%	39%
Catholic	23%	15%
No Religion	18%	43%
Other	4%	3%

Table 2

Relationship of Prior Antisocial Involvement to Prior and Current Alcohol Involvement in Young Alcoholic Men and their Wives (N = 75 Couples)

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Prior Antisocial Behavior-Hu (1)	--				
Lifetime Alcohol Problems Score - Hu(2)	64***	--			
QFV - Hu (3)	03	-24*	--		
Prior Antisocial Behavior - Wi (4)	05	-05	13	--	
Lifetime Alcohol Problems Score -Wi (5)	02	04	04	45***	--
QFV - Wi (6)	-17	-40***	41***	22	15

Note. All entries are Pearsons rs, with decimal points omitted.

* p <.05

** p <.01

***p <.001

Table 3

Relationship of Parent Characteristics to Recent Spousal Violence in Young Alcoholic Families (N = 75 Couples)

Aggressor Parent:	Husband When Aggressor		Wife When Aggressor	
	Severity	Cumulative Intensity	Severity	Cumulative Intensity
Violence Measure				
I. AGGRESSOR PARENT CHARACTERISTICS:				
(A) Alcohol Involvement				
LAPS	46***	50**	13	12
QFV	16	10	09	13
(B) Non-Marital Antisocial Behavior				
ASB	60***	41**	15	15
(C) Background Characteristics				
Age	-35***	-24*	05	04
Years Coupled	-23*	-21	-22	-15
VIQ	-20	-22	18	11
PIQ	-01	-16	-12	-08
FSIQ	-12	-20	11	06

Table 3 (continued)

Aggressor Parent:	Husband When Aggressor		Wife When Aggressor	
	Severity	Cumulative Intensity	Severity	Cumulative Intensity
Violence Measure				
II. TARGET PARENT CHARACTERISTICS:				
(A) Alcohol Involvement				
LAPS	16	-02	10	08
QFV	-18	-23*	21	15
(B) Non-Marital Antisocial Behavior				
ASB	13	08	13	00
(C) Background Characteristics				
Age	-29*	-24*	-07	-11
VIQ	-11	-16	01	-12
PIQ	-14	-21	12	02
FSIQ	-06	-15	06	-07
III. FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS:				
Number of Children	07	07	16	06
SES	-17	-23*	-02	01

Note. All entries are Pearsons rs, with decimal points omitted.

* p <.05

** p <.01

***p <.001

Table 4

Correlation Between Number of Couple Separations and Prior History of Antisocial and Alcohol Involvement (N = 75 Couples)

	Antisocial History (ASB)	Lifetime Alcohol Involvement (LAPS)
For Wives	29*	39***
For Husbands	36**	34**

Note. All entries are Pearsons rs, with decimal points omitted.

* p <.05

** p <.01

***p <.001

Table 5

Relationship of Perceived Family Environment (MOOS FES) to One's Own Prior and Current Alcohol Involvement -- Young Alcoholic Men and their Wives (N = 75 Couples)

	Alcohol Involvement			
	Husband's		Wife's	
	LAPS	QVF	LAPS	QFV
FES Variable				
Cohesion	-12	-03	-03	10
Expressiveness	17	03	10	14
Conflict	24*	-14	07	16
Independence	03	-15	-05	09
Achievement Orientation	-11	12	-06	-03
Intellectual Orientation	08	-07	07	05
Active Recreational Orientation	-20	09	-24*	31**
Moral-Religious Emphasis	-08	-14	-14	-16
Organization	-10	14	-24*	-09
Control	03	-01	-17	-03

Note. All entries are Pearsons rs, with decimal points omitted.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Table 6

Relationship of Family Environment (MOOS FES) to Recent Spousal Violence in Young Alcoholic Couples (N = 75 couples)

Aggressor Parent:	Husband's		Wife's	
	Severity	Cumulative Intensity	Severity	Cumulative Intensity
FES Variable				
Cohesion	-10	-25*	-36**	-29*
Expressiveness	15	07	-07	-22
Conflict	24*	23*	35**	28*
Independence	-01	-09	-08	-11
Achievement Orientation	10	-10	02	08
Intellectual Orientation	04	-18	09	-12
Active Recreational Orientation	-07	-27*	-01	-19
Moral-Religious Emphasis	-15	-13	-03	-27*
Organization	-23*	-17	-07	-08
Control	-04	-15	15	01

Note. FES scores are characterizations of the family environment made by the aggressor spouse. All entries are Pearsons rs, with decimal points omitted.

* p <.05

** p <.01

Figure 1

Path Models of Husband Violence to Wife

Figure 1A: SEVERITY

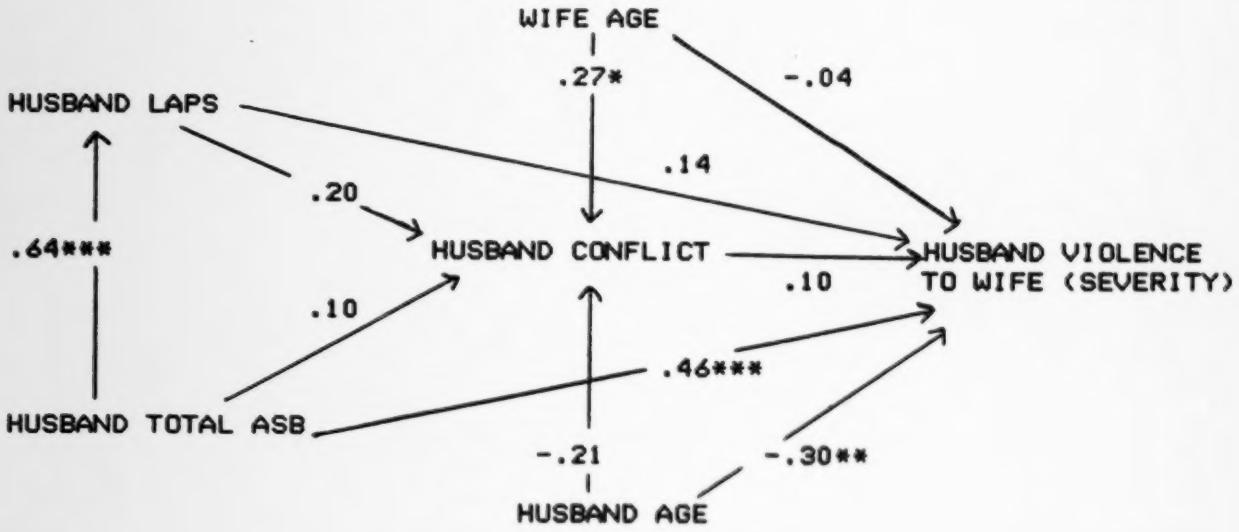

Figure 1B: CUMULATIVE INTENSITY